

Zoo's oldest gorilla passes away at 50 years old
Geriatric male was the "gentleman of gorillas"

SEATTLE—Pete, Woodland Park Zoo's beloved western lowland gorilla, died yesterday at 50 years old. The male ape was one of the oldest male gorillas in North America and the great-grandfather of the zoo's youngest gorilla, Yola.

During the past few days, the geriatric gorilla had been showing signs of slowing down. "His appetite and activity level were low. He was under 24-hour close observation when he passed away in the presence of a gorilla keeper," said Martin Ramirez, mammal curator at Woodland Park Zoo. "We had plans to further evaluate him today."

As a standard procedure, the zoo's animal health team will perform a necropsy (an animal autopsy) and the cause of death will be pending final pathology tests in several weeks.

The median life expectancy for male western lowland gorillas is 32 years old, although gorillas in zoos can live in to their 40s and 50s because of the evolving field of zoo medicine—improved husbandry and management techniques, excellent animal care, better nutrition, increased medical knowledge, and diagnostic and therapeutic techniques.

Pete had lived at Woodland Park Zoo since 1969. He and Nina were the foundation of the zoo's gorilla program and were lifetime residents and companions; the pair produced four offspring together, which have played an important role in producing future generations for the conservation breeding program for gorillas in North American zoos. Pete, who also sired a fifth offspring with another female, had 19 grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren, including the zoo's youngest gorilla, Yola who turns 3 in a few weeks, and one great-great-grandchild. Nina passed away in 2015 due to age-related health issues.

According to Ramirez, Pete lived a long, enriched life thanks to the dedication, expertise, and passion of the zoo's animal care and animal health staff. Pete epitomized gorilla fatherhood—he was the bedrock of the zoo's gorilla program. "Pete was an excellent companion, father and leader of his group. He was known by his keepers as the 'gentleman of gorillas.' Pete was an ageless soul who embodied kindness, courage, strength, patience and leadership," said Ramirez. "This is a very difficult time for our zoo family but we are comforted by the fact his legacy lives on through his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchild."

At the time of his death, Pete lived with 48-year-old female Amanda, who has lived at Woodland Park Zoo since 1994. After Nina's passing three years ago, Amanda was moved from her group to live with Pete so he wouldn't be alone. The gorilla keepers conduct multiple checks daily due to their advanced ages. "They take note of each gorilla's mobility levels, appetites and fluid intake, how responsive their eyes are, and the condition of their gums, teeth and jaws," said Ramirez. Animal care staff will evaluate Amanda's living arrangements to ensure her continued care and welfare.

Two other gorilla groups are currently in Woodland Park Zoo's care: 22-year-old female Nadiri, 18-year-old male Kwame, 17-year-old female Akenji, 11-year-old female Uzumma and 2-year-old female Yola; and 39-year-old male Vip and 33-year-old female Jumoke.

The [western lowland gorilla](#) lives in seven countries across west equatorial Africa: southeast Nigeria, Gabon, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Angola and Equatorial Guinea. All gorillas are endangered; the western lowland gorilla is critically endangered. The estimated population of western lowland gorillas in the wild is approximately 100,000 to



150,000. There are four primary reasons gorillas are endangered. One is habitat destruction caused by logging, mining, and slash and burn agriculture. Poaching for the bushmeat trade, facilitated by logging, has become an immediate threat to the western lowland gorilla population, particularly in Cameroon. Additionally, infectious diseases such as the Ebola virus have become a great threat, killing many gorillas; and climate change is causing the drying of the region, creating negative impacts on forest ecology and species.

Woodland Park Zoo is saving the western lowland gorilla through the [Mbeli Bai Gorilla Study](#). To help support this important project, drop off used handheld electronics (cell phones, MP3 players, handheld games, e-readers, digital still and video cameras, laptops, GPS, portable hard drives, etc.) at the zoo. The handheld electronics are turned over to ECO-CELL, which operates a strict NO LANDFILL program and reimburses organizations. ECO-CELL reuses mineral ore from these devices to reduce the demand for unsustainable coltan mining in the Congo that destroys habitat for critically endangered gorillas. The zoo directs funds from ECO-CELL toward the Mbeli Bai Gorilla Study and other African conservation projects. In addition to saving western lowland gorillas, the zoo also works to save mountain gorillas through the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.

Learn more about the zoo's wildlife work in Africa and beyond at www.zoo.org/conservation.

Fall/winter zoo hours: 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily through April 30. For more information or to become a zoo member, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500.

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